

FROM THE FATHERS

“SINCE the Ascension of Christ is our uplifting, and whither the glory of our Head shall go thither the hope of our body is called, let us then, most dearly beloved, rejoice exceedingly with fitting joy, and let us be glad with devout giving of thanks. For on this day, we are not only made sure heirs of Paradise, but in Christ we have already reached the heights of Heaven, and obtained more abundant gifts through the ineffable favour of Christ than we had lost through the envy of the devil.”

St Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, + 461 A.D.

“HE [Christ] offered to the Father the first-fruits of our nature, and because of the dignity of the Offerer, and the perfection of what was offered, the Father found the gift so acceptable that He received it with His own hands, and placed it close to Himself, saying, *Sit Thou at My right hand* (Ps. 110:1). But to what nature did He say, *Sit Thou at My right hand*? It was to that which had heard the words, *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return* (Gen. 3:19). But did He not so raise it to stand amid the Angels? Was not this honour without measure? It ascended above the heavens; it ascended above the Angels, it passed beyond the Archangels, above the Cherubim; it soared above the Seraphim, higher

than all the powers of Heaven, and it came to rest only before the Throne of the Lord.”

Saint John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, + 407 A.D.



ON THE EIGHTH MATINS GOSPEL OF THE RESURRECTION

WHEREIN IT TELLS THAT THOSE WHO STAY IN CHURCH
REVERENTLY THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE SERVICE WILL
BE VOUCHSAFED GREAT GIFTS

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS ARCHBISHOP OF THESSALONICA

UNIQUELY, as a treasure, the virgin John received through Grace as his Mother the unique Virgin Mother, he whom Christ especially loved, he who was the “Son of Thunder,” whom Christ raised up to heaven and through whom He began to thunder, he who surpassing all others had received the gift to be called a “Son of Thunder,” and for that reason was employed the more for the great voiced preaching, in expounding to us the events concerning the Resurrection from the dead of the Master, and, in informing us of the image of His manifestation after the Resurrection, was heard during the past Sunday, in the Gospel Scriptures which he had written, announcing to the Church: *The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved,* - here he speaks of himself, but let us hear what he says fur-

ther on: - *But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping* (John 20:1-2, 11). For John himself and Peter, having heard from her, hastened to the life-originating tomb, and saw what had come to pass, and from the indications presented to them had believed and marvelled, and went away to their own homes. Mary, however, remained and stood outside the tomb weeping, because as yet she did not possess a complete trust in the resurrection of the Master, even though twice, with the other women, she had come to the tomb; the first time with the Theotokos, as Matthew informs us, saying, *In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake, and so on* (Matt. 28:1-2). Later, now she comes with Peter and John, who on the basis of what they saw, believed and marvelled, and went away. So it was that she had twice come with others to the tomb, and on those occasions those who had accompanied her had believed and trusted, but she had, however, not yet acquired any trust (in the Resurrection of Christ), and being without comfort she wept. We may observe here something similar in respect of struggles and virtues. How for one person who is struggling Grace straightway comes to welcome him and grant him complete trust in view of his predispositions, granting him to taste of the promised rewards, as it were extending to him a philanthropic hand, and accepting them and anointing them in readiness for further struggles. Others wait to the very end of their struggles, thereby preparing, of course, crowns of patience, just as one of the God-bearing Fathers has said: Some before labours, others during labours, and yet others at their departure (i.e. from the body) receive the sacred rewards. This happens through the all-wise Providence of God, which disposes all things that concern us in many and various ways, and dispenses to each as best befits him and serves to his profit, both with regard to acts of virtue and with regard to the Mysteries of the Faith. So it was that, in a wise and in a man-befriending manner disposing things with regard to Mary Magdalene, the Master judged that she should not immediately acquire complete trust in His Resurrection, so that she might be an example to those who came after and dispose them to patience. Let us hear what gifts she was deemed worthy of after this on account of her steadfastness and her patient endurance: *As she wept, says the Evangelist, she stooped down to look into the sepulchre,*

seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain (John 20:11-12). That she stooped down and in her great unease had eyes to search into the tomb is a sign of the most extreme emotional struggle. But initially we must examine the following: how is that, at a time when it was still dark, as the Evangelist said above, she could see everything clearly and in every detail, and from outside was able to see what had come to pass in the cave? Further it is evident that outside it was still dark because the physical day had not yet finally shone forth; but that cave was filled with the light of the Resurrection, which, Mary seeing in a divine way, the more inflamed her love for Christ, and gave her eyes the power to receive the vision of the Angels, and not only to see them but this also enabled her to converse with the Angels, because that light possessed such power. She also saw them in white garments, not only on account of the purity and radiance of the Angelic nature, but also because by their radiance they were proclaiming and manifesting the Mystery of the Resurrection, and further, as it were, actually co-celebrating with us the radiant Day of the Resurrection of the Master. She also observed them sitting, so that they might clearly indicate that they had not just arrived, but had been here earlier, though they had not shown themselves earlier, and so she was given to understand the worthiness of those of them, who are often present though not visible. This was the reason, it seems to me, that they were seated, and also because of their love, which desired them to draw as closely as possible to the place where the body of the Master had lain; because moved by love, they sat at the tomb, one at the head and one at the feet, and thus also they showed that for the Angels both the Divinity of Christ (the place where His head had rested had served as a symbol of this), and His Incarnation (of which the place of His feet was an image) were loved and honoured in equal measure.

And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? - You behold heaven in this cave, or better to say, a heavenly temple raised upon the place of an earthly grave, and a confined place now filled together with the earthly guards with heavenly Angels, who have the great distinction to guard the Tomb of the Life-giving God and who joyously cherish it, though it is now empty. And you, O woman, for what reason do you weep? It was not because of ignorance that they inquired about her dis-

position, but rather, supporting her in her perplexity, to help her to accept them and thus to lay a goodly foundation for the fulfilment of their work. The work of the Angels, who were seated at the tomb of the Life-giver, consisted in proclaiming the glory of the Resurrected One. But to the Angels' question as to the cause of her weeping, she replied, *Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.* What prompted Mary suddenly to turn back? Without a doubt it was the deferential inclination and attention of the Angels themselves to the Master Who had appeared; for here she calls Him only *her* Lord (saying, *they have taken away my Lord*), and she assumes a theft and the taking away of the body, revealing by this, it is true, the disposition of her soul towards Him, but not at all thinking of Him as it befits one to think about God. On the other hand they, by their action show that He is Lord even of the very Angels of God, because until He appeared they were seated at the tomb, but when the Master spontaneously appeared, they quickly arose, and, as corresponded with their form, with reverence and rapture paid Him the utmost attention. Then Mary, turning back to see what sight had so shaken the Angels, saw Jesus standing there, although she did not understand that it was Jesus standing before her, for she considered the Resurrection something unheard of and even impossible. Even though, among other things, the dusk was dispersing with the light of the day, and the Lord did not appear to her in His Divine radiance, but as He had been known in life up till the time of the Passion, Mary did not recognize Him, the Cultivator of souls and the Creator of the world, but took Him to be the tender of the garden there. When, however, he called her and named her by name, saying, *Mary*, then she recognized Him and answered, and changing her perception, she said, *Rabboni, which is to say Master*; but even then, although she saw Him alive, it did not enter her mind to comprehend Him as God, but she related to Him simply as a man of God and a teacher of divine things, and for this reason strove not simply to fall at His feet, but out of love also to touch them, - but she heard, *Touch Me not.* He was as it were saying to her, Inasmuch as your thought does not touch the depth of the Mystery concerning Me, that I am God, now seen by you in the flesh and that same flesh now particularly Divine, then *Touch Me not.* For that must needs have been reserved for the Mother of God, she, who alone among women might touch the Body after the Resurrection,

of the God Who for our sakes had been incarnate of her. That this is so, the Evangelist Matthew announces, for it was for her sake that he says that (the Myrrh-bearing Women) approached and touched the feet (of the Resurrected Lord Christ). To Mary Magdalene, though, He says, *Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father* - which fully corresponds with what He then said for the disciples, *I ascend to My Father*, but as of now *I am not yet ascended*. He said this, so as to free them from their deep concern, and so as to inflame their love and inspire in them an ardent aspiration to see Him. But these last words also apply to Mary Magdalene, *Touch Me not* - because now that body in which I am clothed is more powerful than the fire that flares up, and more full of power, and it will not only in that strength ascend into Heaven, but also to the very Father Himself, Who is above the Heavens; but I have not yet ascended to My Father, because after Arising from the dead, I have as yet not appeared to My disciples. *Go to My brethren*, - for we are all from the one Father, although not in like manner, for I am His Son by nature and of one essence with Him; and they have been adopted to Him through Me. *Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God*, for He is our Father through the grace of adoption of the Spirit; He is His father according to the Divine Essence; and He is our God as the Creator of nature, and His God in accord with the economy for He [God the Son] took on human nature; and for this cause He spoke thus in different ways, so that we might comprehend the mutual differences (understanding in what sense Christ said *to My Father, and to your Father, to My God and to your God*). And through the understanding that He ascends to the Father, He led them to comprehend concerning His body (after the Resurrection), that it was precisely that which He had had on earth, and had earlier had, and had been with them all the time.

But Mary Magdalene, whom we hymn as one of the Myrrh-bearers of Christ, out of whom Christ had expelled seven evil spirits, was thereafter wholly imbued with the sevenfold activity of the Divine Grace of the Spirit.... So it was that this Mary Magdalene for her steadfast persistence was deemed worthy of the vision of the Angels and to converse with them, and having then seen the Lord Himself, she became His Apostle to the Apostles, and from His Divine lips she was instructed,

and being finally convinced of the Resurrection of Christ, she goes to the Apostles, proclaiming to them that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her. We must also consider, brethren, however much Mary Magdalene deferred to the worthiness of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and to John the Theologian, beloved of Christ, nonetheless so much more than they was she then deemed worthy of. For they, hastening to the Tomb, saw only the winding sheet and the linen cloth, but she, thanks to her steadfast persistence, in that she remained to the end and stood at the entrance to the cave, saw not only the Angels before the Apostles did, but she also beheld the Lord of the Angels Himself, risen in the flesh from the dead, and personally she became the one that heard Him, and through His Divine lips she was established as one who fulfilled His commandments.

And, behold, this church appears as an image of His Tomb, or better to say, something more than an image, for that would mean only to represent it. For it has the place, where the Master's Body lies, in the inner chamber behind the veil, where the all-sacred Table is found. So the person who interiorly has recourse to this divine, truly God-filled Tomb, and falls down in reverence and remains until the end, concentrating and directing his thoughts to God, such a person not only comes to know therein the God-inspired words of the Scriptures, as if they were the Angels, who proclaim the Divinity and the humanity of the Word of God incarnate for us, but with his noetic eyes he also clearly sees the Lord Himself; and I will say further he does so even with his physical eyes, for it is with faith that he beholds the Mystical Table, and the Bread of Life abiding thereon; he sees the very enhyposstatic nature of the Word of God, Who became flesh and abode among us; and if he should make himself worthy, It will dwell within him, and he will not only behold, but will also become His communicant, and will have Him dwelling within himself, and he will be filled with the Divine Grace which is granted by Him; just as it was that Mary saw what the Apostles had thirsted to see, such a person will be vouchsafed to see and to be delighted with that which, according to the Apostle's expression, the Angels desire to apprehend, and through this contemplation and communion, he becomes wholly God-seeing.

So, brethren, again rectify the slackening off with regard to the good works of your hands and your weakened knees, and direct your steps aright, walking in the ways of the Lord aright, through righteousness, chaste thoughts, love, humility and truth. Completely abandon the devious paths, those of envy, lying, craftiness, murder, greed, pride and the like, for not only doing them but even entertaining them in your heart makes a man worthy of rejection by God; for man looks upon the face, but God regards the heart; and He Himself tests the heart and what is therein. But we, who have gathered in the house of God, must *gird up the loins of our minds* - as says the Prince of the Apostles, Peter, - *being sober, and hoping to the end for the grace that is brought us at the revelation of Jesus Christ* (see 1 Ptr 1:13). For it is impossible, that, being present in the sacred church of God, having gathered our minds and stretching out therewith to God, penetrating the composition of the sacred hymnology, being attentive thereto from beginning to end, that we should not turn God to us, responding to our thought upon God and the divine words; for there is a certain warmth in the heart, which follows upon such reflections, which disperses bad thoughts like flies, and introduces into the soul spiritual peace and consolation, and grants the body sanctification, as it is said, *My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire was kindled* (Ps. 38:4). And this is precisely what one of the God-bearing Fathers has instructed us, saying: Apply all zeal, so that your interior activity will be according to God, and then you will overcome the outer passions. On this even the Great Paul, in encouraging us, says: *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh* (Gal. 5:16). Admonishing us, he writes in yet another place: *Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth* (Eph. 6:14); so it happens that when the thought is turned to the Divine and abides in Divine Truth, and the desiring faculty of the soul is held within bounds assiduously and the fleshly desires expelled, then the fleshly thoughts are suppressed in us, and then the soul, finding itself in peace, accepts the Grace of the Spirit and establishes the possibility of tasting those future and ineffable good things which the passionate eye and careless man have not seen, and which the ear has not heard and which has not entered into the heart of such a man; and this tasting appears as a pledge of those spiritual good things, and the heart which has received the pledges thereof, becomes spiritual and

accepts the full assurance of its salvation. So then, he who desires to receive such assurance and to recognise those spiritual pledges of eternal good things exactly, let him live as this homily has shown and outlined, for in this manner he will be a fellow citizen of the Saints of God, and a communicant of the eternal and ineffable good things which are promised him, which may we all receive by the grace and love for man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due glory, dominion, honour and worship, together with His Beginningless Father and the Life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

...translated from a Russian text, published by the Brotherhood of St Job of Pochaev, Montreal, 1968



ON MONASTICISM

**By the Ever-Memorable Archbishop Averky
of Jordanville**

Continuation

ALTHOUGH our overview of the monastic vows above is not exacting, yet nonetheless, having been acquainted with them, we cannot fail to see that **those lay people grievously err, who**, in the words of Bishop [now Saint] Ignatius Brianchaninov, **excessively dissociate the monks from themselves in respect of the moral and spiritual**. Be aware that those same lay people make vows at their Baptism, **and ones no less strict at all** than the monastic vows, but simply ones of a more general character, responsive to the general spirit of life, and not particularized like the monastic vows. Before he is immersed in the font and through this born again unto a new life, a life of grace and of holiness, every lay person makes solemn promises before the face of the All-seeing God and in the presence of witnesses: **“to renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his angels, and all his service and all his pride,”** and **“to join**

himself to Christ,” “believing in Him, as King and God.” And not only does he make this promise, but it is categorically emphasized that he does so at that moment decisively and irrevocably, when for the second time the priest asks, “**Hast thou renounced Satan?**” - and he replies, “**I have [renounced],**” and to the question, “**Hast thou joined thyself unto Christ?**” - he replies resolutely, “**I have.**” In comparison with these vows, which every Christian without exception makes, the monastic vows are manifest, as it were, as only an **elaboration**, a **strengthening** and, as it were, a **deepening** of the baptismal vows. This is why, even in the order of tonsure to the Little Schema itself, the tonsure is called, not without reason, a **second Baptism**, in consequence of which at the tonsure, when it is completed, we chant that most joyous hymn, full of jubilation, which is sung at the celebration of the Mystery of Baptism itself: “**All ye that in Christ have been baptized, Christ have ye put on.**” And among our Godly-wise Fathers and Teachers of the Church, there exists for this very reason the opinion that the monastic tonsure is not simply a rite, but is itself a Mystery [*Sacrament*]: the Mystery of second Baptism, during which the vows of renouncing the devil of faithfulness to Christ are repeated and at the same time intensified.

In fact, a monk gives a **vow of virginity**, promising to preserve his chastity. But equally are not the lay people obliged to preserve their chastity until they marry, and within marriage itself to remain mutually faithful, and to maintain marital chastity, which, according to the explanations of the Holy Fathers, consists in the spouses’ temperate abstention from that which enslaves their souls to the sensual passions? One should never forget that our Church, which blesses and solemnly sanctifies the order of a first marriage for every Christian, is very critical of a second marriage, even though She blesses it; and for a third marriage there is not even a service and it is only permitted because such a thing is regarded as better than fornication. Those who contract a third marriage are deprived of Communion by the Church for five years as an *epitimia* for their lack of restraint.

A monk gives a **vow of non-possessiveness**. But are even lay people, according to the Gospel, permitted to accumulate wealth in order to spend it on their own whims and to live according to their own plea-

sure? Does the Gospel not condemn that light-minded rich man, who all his life was adorned in fine clothing and spent his time carousing with his friends, without the least concern for the fate of the unfortunate pauper Lazarus, who lay covered in sores at the very gate of his house? And the other rich man, who anticipating enjoying his riches and so said to his soul, **“Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry,”** - did he not hear a stern judgment from God: **“Fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”** (Luke 12:16-22). And is it only for the monks, and not for all Christians, to heed the word of the Lord, that dread warning about the passion for riches, **“A rich man shall hardly enter into the Kingdom of heaven.... It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God”** (Matt. 19:24)?

And is it not said to all Christians, **“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”** (Matt. 6:19-21)? And this is completely comprehensible. Because the person who accumulates wealth and is bound to it in his heart, he relies on the power of his riches more than he does on God, and his riches occupy in his soul the place that should belong to God, and they become for him a totem, and idol, a false god, standing in the place of the True God. He who loves riches is traitor to God. **“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”**

A monk gives a vow of obedience, renouncing his own will. But are lay people allowed to act in everything according to their unbridled and sinful will? Are they not bound by obedience to the commandments of God, to their spiritual fathers and directors, and in general to older and leading people, and that not only in spiritual things but also in worldly civil life? How would it be on this earth, if every individual lay man started to live according to his own will, and just as he wished! Be assured that it is not just to the monks, but to every Christians that the Apostle Paul addresses the admonition: **“Obey them that have the rule**

over you, and submit yourselves” (Heb. 13:17). Then again, the admonition of the Apostle Peter: **“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of them that do well”**(1 Ptr 2:13).

And the layman, if he wants to be a true Christian, and to make progress in the spiritual life, must choose a spiritual father for himself, one whom he trusts, must reveal to him everything in his heart, just as a monk does to his elder, and throughout his life must act according to the guidance of his counsels. It was thus that all believing lay people lived in the good old days.

So, from all the above it is clear to us that the monastic vows are nothing **new** within Christianity, nor something unprecedented in Christianity, something over and above the natural, or something that might be called a chasm between the monks and normal Christians - certainly not! The monastic vows are simply the repetition and, coincidentally, the enhancement, and at the same time, the intensifying of the Baptismal vows; they are the very same vows which were made in more general words and expressions by every Christian, who has come to Holy Baptism, when he **“renounces Satan, and all his works, and all his angels, and all his service and all his pride,”** and **“to joins himself to Christ.”**

... to be continued in the next issue.



“MIRACLES are not impossible from a logical standpoint, and right reason does not deny them. Natural laws do not have the claim to be the only ones, nor are they threatened with being overturned by the appearance of other laws, supernatural ones, which also are conducive to the development and furtherance of creation.... Miracles are a consequence of the Creator’s love for His creatures.”

***Saint Nectarius of Pentapolis, the Wonderworker of Aegina,
+ 1920 A.D.***

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

The following letter is strictly not “from correspondence,” but was deposited anonymously in our question box at the back of the church. It is so long and raises so many questions, that I thought it advisable not to answer it with a short reply in church, as I do with most of the questions put there. We have reproduced the letter as received, with its eccentricities of punctuation, etc. Naturally, when one receives a letter such as this, one wonders who posted it. I thought of two people, but in both cases internal evidence in the letter rules them out and I am no wiser, so any remarks made which might reflect upon our questioner are not directed personally at him or her, but are simply answers to the points raised. All we know of this person is what they have written, the fact they can type and that they at least once visited our church! Because the question is so long and convoluted, I have decided to reproduce it in italics, with my comments (for what they are worth) interspersed in regular type. I hope this will be clear. - A.A.

I refer to Matthews Gospel Chapter 1 verse 25 “and he knew her not TILL she had brought forth her firstborn son and he called his name Jesus” The implications of this verse - Here we hit our first difficulty, or rather first two difficulties. As Orthodox Christians we do not read the Scriptures as if they were a handbook of Christianity. Had the Holy Spirit desired to give us a kind of Highway Code of Orthodoxy in the Scriptures, one imagines that they would have been a great deal more concise and clearer! We read the Scriptures in the light of the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and what is often referred to as “the pious mind of the Church.” We cannot approach them, thinking I will read this book and then know what Orthodoxy teaches. The reading of the Scriptures for enlightenment also presupposes our living within the tradition of the Church and our struggling to overcome our passions and sins, to achieve purification and enlightenment. This brings us to the second difficulty: we cannot take a verse and deduce “implications” form it. In any case your implications might be different from mine. We would have a million “implications” or interpretations. Furthermore, what is one to make of such verses as “thy youth shall be renewed as the eagle’s” (Ps 102:5)?

I can think of two implications of this immediately: both wrong. One is that eagles are somehow rejuvenated at some stage; and the other is that eagles possess youths, whom they replace from time to time! Obvious nonsense! And what are we to make by “implication” of “His beloved is like a son of the unicorns”? This is **not** the way to approach Scripture, but to return to your thought: - *the implications of this verse are:*

1) *That after the FIRSTborn normal physical “relations began.* - This is a common assumption among many contemporary Protestants (which made me think that this question had been posted by a Protestant, although further on they speak as if they believe they are Orthodox), although, it must be said in fairness, that it is in fact far from the teaching of the first Protestant reformers. It is undoubtedly the fruit of a modern world view, which can only see personal fulfilment within a sexual context of some kind. The Orthodox world view is, in accord with our Saviour’s teaching (Matthew 19:10-12) and that of the Holy Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 7:7), that virginity is, as Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, “stronger than the power of death,” and “ought to be preferred by the intelligent.” However, Saint John Chrysostom answers your “implication” directly: “Here he has used the word ‘till,’ not that you should suspect that afterwards he (Joseph) did know her, but to inform you that before the birth the Virgin was wholly untouched by man. But why then, it may be said, has he used the word ‘till’? Because it is usual in Scripture often to do this, and to use the expression without reference to limited times. For so with respect to the Ark also, it is said, ‘The raven returned not till the earth was dried up.’ And yet it did not return even after that time. And when discoursing also of God, Scripture says, ‘From age to age Thou art,’ not as fixing limits in this case.”

2) *That there were other births Jesus being only the FIRSTborn* - again St John Chrysostom will reply to your thought: “This in its turn he leaves for you to perceive: namely, that not even after this, she having so become a mother, and having been counted worthy of a new sort of travail, and a child-bearing so strange, could that righteous man ever have endured to know her. For if he had known her, and had kept her in place of a wife, how is it that our Lord commits her, as unprotected, and having no one, to His disciple, and commands him to take her to his own home?” *this suggests, of course, Gnostic thinking (ie: interpreting references to*

Jesus' "brothers" literally) - My first thought here is that it is sad that our correspondent, while claiming to be Orthodox (see below) has spent time studying Gnostic teachings, but has apparently paid so little attention to learning the teaching of the Church, though one suspects that what he / she has studied is not Gnosticism but the now widely promulgated populist neo-Gnosticism. Had his / her thoughts led him / her to smell a whiff of Gnosticism, he /she would have shown some spiritual intelligence by examining whether his / her thoughts and "implications" were from above or from some other source. However, again St John Chrysostom whose works it would have profited our correspondent to study rather than any form of "Gnosticism," answers this impiety: "How then, one may say, are James and the others called His brethren? In the same kind of way as Joseph himself was ostensibly the husband of Mary." The tradition of the Church and the lives of the saints tell us that the "brethren" of the Saviour were in fact the sons of Joseph by his previous marriage. *The Cathars, a western Gnostic manifestation, claimed that Jesus Himself had physical descendants known only to themselves.* - Well, many people believe a lot of rubbish, and one supposes that the Cathars were not excluded from this. Our measure is not what some medieval heretical sect believed, but what the Church teaches.

The anomaly arising from these implications? - You mean, I think the confusion in your own mind; there is no anomaly for one well grounded in Orthodoxy. *We in The Orthodox Church* - This is the statement that rather flummoxed me, as it appears from nearly everything our correspondent writes that they have very little understanding of Orthodox teaching, and had they not included this phrase, I would have assumed they were not Orthodox at all - *refer to Mary as Ever Virgin (aei parthenos) yet the verse cited states physical relations commenced following the firstborn son - It certainly does not;* that was simply your personal "implication." - *also suggesting that subsequent births may have ensued.* - Again, not so. Having set out on a course of private interpretation of the Scriptures, you are now adding false premise upon false premise and deviating more and more. - *I suspect this apparent contradiction is resolved as follows: just as we in Orthodoxy - (!), in contrast to western heresies, interpret the immaculate Conception as a spiritual rather than a literal conception* - I am even unsure of what you mean here. The term "Immaculate

Conception” in English usually refers to the supposed immaculate conception of the Theotokos by St Anne, now an article of faith for Roman Catholics, but an idea considered erroneous by the Orthodox. However, some Orthodox writers, especially later Russian ones, use the term to refer to the conception of the Saviour Himself by the All-holy Virgin. In the latter case, we do not believe that the conception was not somehow “literal.” It is a fact. In the former case we believe the conception of Mary by St Anne was a fact, that it was miraculous in that Anne was past child-bearing and had been barren, but not the modern Roman Catholic doctrine about its being immaculate. - *so too does Mary’s virginity have a spiritual dimension superceding any literal sense.* - Well, we do not believe in myths! If, as you have suggested, Mary did not remain a Virgin after giving birth, - a blasphemous thought for the Orthodox, - then the Church would be propagating a lie in calling her Ever-Virgin! A second blasphemous idea. Regarding the Theotokos’s perpetual virginity, look at the Old Testament reading that we so often use at Vespers on feasts of the Mother of God, Ezekiel 44:2. It is not brought to our attention so often for no good purpose.

It is true that there are spiritual dimensions to the Theotokos’s Virginity and ones of immense significance (see, for instance, the acclamation in the Akathist Hymn: Rejoice, thou who flashest forth the type of the Resurrection), but such “dimensions” could not have existed had there not been the **fact** of the Theotokos’s Virginity. A non-existence can hardly have a dimension. The Orthodox Church believes firmly that the Theotokos conceived as a virgin, that she gave birth as a virgin, and that she remained a virgin thereafter. This belief is not based on mythologizing her rôle in the saving dispensation. The Church is the pillar and ground of truth, - her teachings therefore are not based on any falsehood at all. - *Please rest assured it is not my intention to forment heresy only to gain instruction lest, being questioned myself, I am embarrassed by having no answer. Your comments appreciated.* - Thank you for this assurance at the end, but I hope that before you take it upon yourself to answer any questions about our Faith, you first study that Faith in some depth, otherwise, be modest enough to say that you have very little understanding and refer anyone to someone who can better answer any enquirers.

NEWS SECTION

ANNOUNCEMENT ON VASSULA RYDEN

VASSULA RYDEN has presented herself as something of a woman with a certain charisma, and her innovative ideas have even been adopted by certain Anglican communities and thus found some currency even beyond the Orthodox communion. It is then with some relief that we can report that on 16th March this year, **the Œcumenical Patriarchate issued the following announcement** concerning her teaching: ‘The Orthodox Church, following strictly the shining example and teaching of the Holy Apostles, the teaching of the Fathers of the Church who have their succession, and the divinely-inspired decisions of the Œcumenical Synods, safeguards as a pearl of great price the faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which the Christian plenitude experiences through their participation in the Sacraments and entire spiritual life of the divinely-founded ecclesiastical body. Hence, whatever movement and improvised tension, personal or collective, in contempt or in breach of the dogmas of the Orthodox Christian faith and life in Christ within the Church as the only path for the salvation of our souls, all the more the self-proclaimed “supposedly charismatic” personality, is rejected always as an unacceptable innovation. In this spirit, and for the beneficial protection of our pious Orthodox plenitude from dangerous spiritual confusion, who do not know well matters underlying the risk of delusion, we denounce from the Mother Church Vasiliki Paraskevis Pentaki - Ryden, widely known as “Vassula,” and her organization founded under the title “True Life In God” which rashly and frivolously proposes teachings based on the supposed “direct dialogue between her and the Founder of the Church Jesus Christ our Lord”, and those conquered by her and the supporters of “True Life In God”, which deviate arbitrarily from the God-given teaching of the Church, but also scandalize the Orthodox phronema of pious believers. Hence, we call upon the proponents of these unacceptable innovations and the supporters who maintain them, who henceforth are not admitted to ecclesiastical communion, not only to not be involved in the pastoral work of the local Holy Metropolis, but also

to not preach their novel teachings, to prevent the appropriate sanctions under the Holy Canons. We express, lastly, the profound sorrow of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the acts of some - fortunately few - clergy of the Orthodox Church to be found at talks of the said “Vassula” and give to her a “certificate of Orthodoxy.””

PROTOPRESBYTER VALERY ALEXEEV REPOSES

FATHER VALERY was born in 1937, in Odessa. His father, Boris Andreyevich, and his mother, Vera Petrovna Alexeeva-Grossul-Tolstaya, were both Orthodox. Fr. Valery’s mother was persecuted for fifteen years as a member of the nobility and landed gentry. Fr. Valery’s father was a lieutenant in General Denikin’s army and earned the Order of St. George, Imperial Russia’s highest military order. During World War II, he was a member of the Russian All-Military Union and Russian Corps in Serbia. He was repatriated later to the Soviet Union. He was trained as a medical doctor. He was sentenced to the prison camps for 15 years in 1950 and rehabilitated posthumously in 1993. The family lived in a house in Odessa on the same street and near the house of the Aleksandrov family, who were parents of ROCA Bishop Daniel. From the age of seven, Fr. Valery was an altar server in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, which was known as the “church of the Russian officers.” Orphaned by the death of his mother, who died at an early age from tuberculosis, and his father’s imprisonment, he had a difficult childhood and equally difficult teenage years. The love of life in the church was felt from an early age and formed the basis for the rest of his life. He began reading on the *kliros* of the Holy Trinity Church in Odessa, and in the 1970’s, he entered the second class of the Leningrad Theological Seminary. He completed his studies at the Moscow Theological Seminary. Fr. Valery was made a reader, then later a subdeacon, and was ordained a deacon and priest in 1994. He served in parishes of the Tulsk-Belevsk, Kirovogradsk, Nikolayevsk and Odessa dioceses of the Moscow Patriarchate. Fr. Valery was later named dean of the Izmailovsk district and taught comparative religion and sectology at the Odessa Theological Seminary. He was also the

secretary of the MP Odessa diocese administration. He never supported “Sergianist” church policies and fought for the truth at every assignment in the church. After long considerations of his life in the church, a pastor’s duty, responsibility before God and his personal salvation, and the grave violations of dogma by the MP episcopate, he decided to join the Russian True Orthodox Church, which was a jurisdiction of the ROCA Synod of Bishops at that time. He joined as a priest on 2nd November, 1997, after completing the rite of penitence as instructed by the Holy Gospel: “And ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall set you free.” He served as the rector of the Church of Holy Martyr Tsarevich Alexis from early 1997. He was dean of the Odessa deanery from February, 2001, chairman of the Spiritual Court of the diocese from February, 2002, and dean of the Sts. Cyril and Methodius Theological Seminary from 1998. On 4th April n.s., Fr. Valery suffered a brain hemorrhage and was taken to the hospital. He never regained consciousness. He died on 25th March / 7th April, on the feast day of the Annunciation, as one of the clergymen of our Sister Church, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad under the presidency of **His Eminence Metropolitan Agafangel**. His Eminence, the First Hierarch, **His Grace, Bishop George of Bolgrad and Belgorod-Dnestrov**, and nine priests served at his funeral in the Archangel Michael Cathedral in Odessa. His life shows us something of the struggles of confessing clergymen in contemporary Russia. *May his Memory be Eternal!*

SOUROZH DECISION ON CONFESSION

A REGULAR MEETING of the **Sourozh Diocesan Council** (Moscow Patriarchate) was held at the **Russian Orthodox Cathedral, Ennismore Gardens, London SW7**, on 24th March this year. Among other things, the Council adopted the following pastoral resolution: “Continuing and developing the discussion of the question of regular participation by the laity in the Sacrament of Confession which took place at the Diocesan clergy meeting, the Council approved the decision to send a pastoral recommendation to all the parishes of the diocese calling upon the laity to participate regularly in the Sacrament of Confession,

at a frequency of not less than once every forty days – a period of time considered sacred from Biblical times. Should a layperson abstain from Confession for more than forty days, then he or she should not receive Holy Communion, the preparation for which is inconceivable without repentance and reconciliation with one’s neighbours. In the case where a layperson desires to receive Communion frequently, they should be exhorted to prepare worthily for receiving the Holy Mysteries, but it should not be required that they should confess immediately before every Communion, provided that they confess more than once every forty days.”



SIR-UK NEWS

BISHOP AMBROSE’S TWO VISITS TO ENGLAND

IN HIS PASTORAL CONCERN for us, **His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methoni** made two visits to England last month. First he came to celebrate the dedication festival of the Convent in London with **Mother Vikentia and the sisters** there. On the eve of the feast, he presided at the Vigil Service and the next morning at the Lenten Hours, Typika, Vespers and Liturgy of St Basil the Great. His Grace stayed over in London to serve at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on the Friday, the Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel, and then came to Brookwood for the Laudation of the Mother of God that evening, which was the eve of the Saturday of the Akathist. He served at Brookwood on that Saturday, which was in fact the anniversary of our first Liturgy at Brookwood (which had been celebrated by the late **Bishop Constantine** on the Saturday of the Akathist in 1982) and for the services of the Sunday of St Mary of Egypt. On the Wednesday he flew to Moscow en route to South Ossetia, and returned to London very late on the evening of the Tuesday of Great Week, being met at Heathrow by members of the Brotherhood. He stayed at Brookwood for the Wednesday, praying in the altar for the greater part of the Divine services, and receiving the Holy Mysteries at

the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, but he led the service of Holy Unction that evening, and was then taken to Willesden, where he served for the nuns for the rest of Great Week, and for Pascha itself. On the Sunday afternoon, after lunching with the sisters, he again came to Brookwood and joined us for the Agape Vespers service and the reception we hold afterwards. It happened that at that service we had nine people originally from the Congo here, three of them Orthodox, and the Bishop was able to speak to them in French, and to tell them about his missionary journeys to that part of the world. On Bright Monday, he served with us at the Divine Liturgy, and early on Tuesday morning he left England for Greece. Without His Grace's help we would not have been able to keep the full round of services going both here and at the Convent, and we are immensely grateful for his extraordinary pastoral love in coming to help us, when he has so many other duties.

NEW ICON

ON ST GEORGE'S DAY, a hand-painted icon of **Saint Ambrose of Milan**, that we had ordered from the sisters of the **Convent of St Elizabeth the Grand Duchess, Etna, California**, arrived safely at Brookwood. St Ambrose is, of course, the name saint of Bishop Ambrose of Methoni, and we ordered it as a thanksgiving for the pastoral care he has shown us in the last almost five years.

PALM SUNDAY FLOWER COLLECTION

ON PALM SUNDAY, we had a collection for the flowers needed to decorate the epitaphios and the church for Pascha, and, in addition to the usual freewill offerings deposited in the alms box at the back of the church, we collected **£256.33**. Our thanks to all those who contributed. For Palm Sunday itself, **Madeline Antoniazzi** donated a number of palm branches and palm crosses to be blessed, and **Archondoulla Cleouvoullou** gave us quantities of branches of olive.

ALICE'S PRESENTATION

ON LAZARUS SATURDAY (3rd /16th April), **Alice Newton**, the teenage daughter of James Newton, came with her father and younger sister, and interviewed Fr Niphon, asking about Orthodox beliefs and worship. The interview was part of a school project, and has been *Youtubed*. Alice kindly sent us this version, which we have sent round to the people on our Synod in Resistance, U.K., list. Her family are practising Roman Catholics and her questions showed that she takes her beliefs seriously. During Bright Week, the whole Newton family came again to attend one of our Vespers services during the feast, and they were thus briefly able to meet Bishop Ambrose, who that evening was helping out in the choir!

THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

THIS MONTH, we owe an immense debt of gratitude to a number of volunteers and helpers, who assisted us over Holy Week and the Paschal Feast. Within the Brotherhood, we had all been suffering with colds, and at that point our choir-monk had almost lost his voice, and so your help was particularly appreciated. **Martin Smith** from the Isle of Wight St Boniface Mission stepped into the breach, and very competently led the chanting of the Lamentations on Great Friday evening. **Vasileos and Evphi Calcanteras, Elena Holden and Peter Bartlett** brought or provided meals for us during the days when the services were longest and most arduous. Vasileos and Evphi also organized **the team that decorated the epitaphios** for the burial shroud of our Saviour, and did a very beautiful job; and the Calcanteras came yet again to help clean up the church at the end of Bright Week. An **anonymous helper** also did some beautiful flower arrangements for the church; we are so used to seeing the flowers stuck in pots, like leaks in a barrel at a street market, that to see these beautiful and professional displays was a real joy. **Roxana Gafita, Baroness Anna von Bennigsen, and Matias Fagerlund** helped with taxiing the Bishop to and from London. **Benjamin Waterhouse** was this year's Belly of Hades. **Edward Kalnakov**, aided a little by his father,

Nicholas, built the paschal bonfire for us, coming on several Saturday's to do so. Our thanks too to all those who provided foods for the Easter meal around the bonfire, and those who stayed to clear up afterwards. In this respect, **Thomas Garland from Somerset**, who had stayed with us for a few days for the feasts, did an immense amount of work as he had also with helping with cooking, and he & **Antony Bell** helped with the chanting and reading in the choir. To all these and others whom we may have overlooked: our thanks. May the Lord Himself bless you and reward you richly. Although our celebration this year was something of a struggle with the brotherhood members themselves feeling under the weather, we were uplifted by the archpastoral care of Bishop Ambrose and by the help that all these people afforded us. One slight shadow on the celebration was that on Easter morning, having finished their own celebration, a group of Russians from a West London church, seemingly very much "the worse for wear" (as the saying goes), descended upon us, fortunately when most of our people had already left, and gave us an example of how *not* to celebrate the feasts of the Church. Two much more welcome things are more worthy of mention. Most years it seems that after Easter Day itself the church empties, but this year, for the Bishop's Liturgy on the Monday we had about 25 people, and almost as many on the Tuesday. Throughout the week, we had lay people join us, which was very encouraging and uplifting. And we should mention the help that the **Romanian Traditionalists** gave us over the feast. At those first two Bright Week Liturgies and again on Thomas Sunday, they helped with our cold-weakened choir, and on St Mary of Egypt Sunday, when the Bishop was here, they also joined in the chanting and chanted the 50th Psalm before the communion of the faithful. This was not only a great help for us, but was a spiritual joy, one for which we are very grateful.

VISITING GROUPS

Wednesday 7th / 20th April: **Spelthorne University of the Third Age Local History Group** visited the Brotherhood, and were given a talk about our beliefs and worship. It being Great Wednesday, the visit was somewhat shorter than usual. The group leader was **Sheila Montague**.

Tuesday, 13th / 26th April: **John Clarke** brought a group of visitors to see the church after Vespers. The group comprised about thirty people and they all commented on the beauty of the paschal decorations, it being Bright Tuesday.

Sunday, 18th April / 1st May; **Val Pretlove** organized a group to see the cemetery. The whole group amounted to about eighty people, and so they split into two smaller groups, one led by Val and the other by John Clarke, and came one after the other to see the church.

Tuesday, 27th April / 10th May: About fifteen people from the **Little Acorns History Group**, which meets at St Catherine's Village Hall, Guildford, visited the church and exhibition room. They called their group Little Acorns, because big trees grow from little acorns.

NEW COCKEREL

ROB LINDSAY, who had come here to service our fire extinguishers, saw the hens, and on 9th May brought us a cockerel, a handsome golden / white year-old bird, as gift to take charge of them.



PRACTICAL TIP

WHEN IN CHURCH with your children, do not simply try to keep them quiet (that will bore them), but also and importantly teach them to pray.



“WHAT is good, except God? So let us leave to Him all that concerns us, and good will come to us, for He Who is Good is certainly also the Giver of good gifts.”

Venerable Nilus of Sinai, + c.450 A.D.